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Contents

Preface	1
Invited lectures	3
G. Borg: <i>Psychophysics and intersubjectivity</i>	4
G. Hatfield: <i>Why does perceptual realism matter?</i>	5
Theme session 1	7
M. Wittmann: <i>Effects of movement, emotion, and embodiment on the perception of time</i>	8
D. Zakay, G. Mioni: <i>Movement and speed associated with a stimulus affect the estimation of its duration</i>	9
Zh. Shi: <i>From eye to hand: Implicit enaction expands subjective tactile duration</i>	10
J. L. O. Bueno, F. C. Nather: <i>Aspects of emotional contents and movement perception on subjective time experience</i>	11
A. Giersch, C. Duval, R. L. Capa: <i>Temporal order judgments are impaired in patients with schizophrenia: A link with emotional withdrawal?</i>	12
Theme session 2	13
W. Skrandies: <i>Perception, cognition, and brain activity: Introductory remarks</i>	14
J. Kornmeier, M. Bach: <i>EEG correlates of multistable perception</i>	15
W. Skrandies: <i>Electrophysiological studies on perception and learning</i>	16
Th. Koenig <i>et al.</i> : <i>Agency and ownership are independent components of auditory-verbal self-monitoring</i>	17
H. Witte: <i>Methodological aspects of connectivity analyses of the neuromatrix of pain</i>	18
Theme session 3	19
H. Atmanspacher: <i>Complementarity in cognition</i>	20
H. Atmanspacher: <i>Order effects in sequential measurements of non-commuting psychological observables</i>	21
J. Busemeyer: <i>Quantum models of cognition and decision</i>	22
P. beim Graben: <i>Complementarity in cognition entailed by bounded rationality</i>	23
Th. Filk: <i>The relevance of Bell-type inequalities for mental systems</i>	24
Theme session 4	25
D. Oberfeld: <i>Estimating the sensitivity in discrimination tasks: Recent challenges and advances</i>	26
R. Ulrich, D. Vorberg: <i>Estimation of discrimination performance in 2AFC tasks: Pitfalls and improved estimators</i>	27
Å. Hellström, Th. H. Rammsayer: <i>Weber Fractions and Time-Order Errors for long and short durations: Implications for modeling</i>	28
R. Balk, F. Klöckner, D. Oberfeld: <i>A new look on “order effects” and sensitivity in two-interval discrimination tasks: Decisions weights and internal noise</i>	29
O. Dyjas, K.M. Bausenhardt: <i>Mechanisms of stimulus discrimination: Evidence from the Type B effect</i>	30
M. A. García-Pérez, E. Peli: <i>An “I can’t tell” response option prevents artifactual overestimation of the difference limen in bisection tasks</i>	31
R. Alcalá-Quintana, M. A. García-Pérez: <i>Effects of criterion changes on estimates of the difference limen</i>	32

Theme session 5	33
D. Kleinböhl: <i>Introduction: System identification in the psychophysical assessment of nociception</i>	34
D. Kleinböhl: <i>On the road to system identification: Psychophysical assessment of nociceptive mechanisms</i>	35
J. R. Buitenweg, H. G. E. Meijer: <i>PaINSIGHT: Evaluation of nociceptive function from a system theory perspective</i>	36
R.J. Doll, H. G. E. Meijer, J. R. Buitenweg: <i>Multiple threshold tracking methods for improved observation of nociceptive function</i>	37
H. Yang, H. G. E. Meijer, J. R. Buitenweg: <i>System identification of the nociceptive function</i> ...	38
J. L. Hay, G. J. Groeneveld: <i>The evaluation of nociceptive function during early clinical drug development</i>	39
Free talks 1	41
Y. Nakajima <i>et al.</i> : <i>Perceptual processing of pairs of acoustically marked time intervals: Correspondence between psychophysical and electrophysiological data</i>	42
T. Kishida, Y. Nakajima, K. Ueda: <i>Effects of elimination of power-fluctuation factors from critical-band noise-vocoded speech</i>	43
J. R. Schoenherr, J. Logan: <i>Attention and working memory as determinants of identification thresholds for non-native speech sounds</i>	44
L. Fostick, H. Babkoff: <i>Individual differences in auditory spectral temporal order judgments</i>	45
Free talks 2	47
J. Townsend, K. Salibayeva: <i>Let's face it: Attempted incipient unification of differential geometric and dynamic concepts of facial expressions</i>	48
W. Ehm, J. Wackermann: <i>Hyperbolic geometry of Ehrenstein–Orbison type illusions</i>	49
H. Colonius, E. N. Dzhafarov: <i>Ultrametric Fechnerian scaling</i>	50
E. N. Dzhafarov, H. Colonius: <i>G. Th. Fechner: Correcting historical misrepresentations</i>	51
Free talks 3	53
S. Link: <i>The circle of similarity</i>	54
V. Shakuf, D. Algom: <i>Who neglects base rate, perceivers or investigators: The effect of base rate on Stroop and Garner effects</i>	55
T. L. Hubbard: <i>Is the flash-lag effect a special case of representational momentum?</i>	56
M. A. Elliott <i>et al.</i> : <i>Golden Section effects in visual cognition: A signature for complex-system organization?</i>	57
Free talks 4	59
B. Estner, Th. Lachmann: <i>Spatial representations of numerical and non-numerical quantities in the auditory domain: Pitch and number</i>	60
Th. Schmidt: <i>Measuring unconscious cognition without unconscious stimuli: Beyond the zero-awareness criterion</i>	61
P. Hannan, E. Galanter: <i>A psychophysical approach to early human development</i>	62
V. Sarris: <i>The relational psychophysics paradigm: “Task switching” and data variability in comparative-developmental studies</i>	63
Free talks 5	65
F. Müller <i>et al.</i> : <i>Quantifying mental strain required to carry out everyday activities: German, Japanese and Canadian students</i>	66
T. Jauhiainen, D. Schaffrath: <i>Yrjö Reenpää and psychophysics</i>	67

R. Luccio: <i>The ‘alley problem’: A neglected debate on size–distance invariance in the XVII and XVIII centuries</i>	68
H. E. Ross, G. L. J. Schönbeck: <i>The excursions of Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) into the moon illusion</i>	69
Poster session 1	71
R. Bååth, G. R. Patching: <i>Separating predictive responses from reactive responses in isochronous finger tapping</i>	72
J. Birkenbusch, W. Ellermeier, F. Kattner: <i>Octuplicate this interval!</i>	73
N. Borter, S. Troche, Th. H. Rammsayer: <i>A fixed-links modeling approach to elucidate measurement impurity in reaction time data</i>	74
J. L. O. Bueno, A. Parreira: <i>Effects of syntactic and semantic information in music composition on subjective perception of time</i>	75
A. Calderon et al.: <i>Birds of a feather who flock together still don’t assimilate</i>	76
E.A. Firmino, J. L. O. Bueno: <i>Musical tonal modulation between minor keys and subjective time</i>	77
D. Fitousi: <i>Object-based attention: A General Recognition Theory approach</i>	78
L. Fostick: <i>Short-term learning effect in different psychoacoustic measures</i>	79
P. Hannan: <i>A case study of time perception in the high level gymnast</i>	80
E. Hasuo et al.: <i>The filled duration illusion with the method of adjustment when filled vs. empty comparison intervals are used</i>	81
G. Mioni, F. Stablum, S. Grondin: <i>Spatial compatibility in duration discrimination with manual and vocal responses</i>	82
N. Nunberg, D. Algom: <i>Stand by your Stroop: The Stroop effect decreases in a standing position</i>	83
S. Parker et al.: <i>Context effects in estimates on objective scales: Scale distortion?</i>	84
G. R. Patching, R. Bååth: <i>Assessing response times and peak force of responses to visual size and brightness</i>	85
P. Poncelet, A. Giersch: <i>Implicit coding of the temporal structure of events</i>	86
Th. H. Rammsayer, M. Verner: <i>On the effect of nontemporal stimulus magnitude on perceived duration as assessed by the method of temporal reproduction</i>	87
B. Schneider, M. A. Reich, M. Mozuraitis: <i>Detecting and measuring auditory-cognitive interactions in speech comprehension</i>	88
V. Shakuf, F. Kutzner, K. Fiedler: <i>A fresh look at an old concept: Selective attention to aspects of a stimulus</i>	89
D. B. Terhune, S. Russo, R. C. Kadosh: <i>Visual cortex GABA predicts perceived duration</i>	90
K. Ueda, Y. Nakajima, T. Fujioka: <i>Factor analyses of power fluctuations in spoken sentences of eight languages: Analyses of individual data</i>	91
A. Vallesi et al.: <i>Cultural modulations of space-time compatibility effects</i>	92
K. M. Varadarajan: <i>Anti-mirror neuron system model for affordance based k-TR Common Coding Theory</i>	93
M. Verner, Th. H. Rammsayer: <i>Does perceived duration depend on physical and numerical stimulus magnitudes?</i>	94
Poster session 2	95
R. Actis-Grosso, P. Ricciardelli: <i>Static faces, dynamic bodies: The recognition of emotions in typically-developed individuals and high-functioning autistic adults</i>	96
E. Borg, G. Borg: <i>How well does the Wong–Baker FACES scale identify the variation of pain?</i>	97

E. Borg: <i>Perception of blackness as a training material for the Borg CR100 Scale®</i>	98
J. C. Gonçalves et al.: <i>A Functional Measurement approach to the Child Anxiety and Pain Face Scale</i>	99
T. Gur, L. Niv, D. Algom: <i>Losing ground: The perception of height is affected by the makeup of the ground beneath</i>	100
T. L. Hubbard, S. E. Ruppel: <i>Effects of contrast and background on visual representational momentum</i>	101
E. A. Marsja et al.: <i>Maintenance of the distractive effect of deviating vibrotactile stimuli in a cross-modal oddball paradigm</i>	102
I. C. Martins, A. M. Oliveira, B. Steenbergen: <i>Motion extrapolation in people with motor constraints: Evidence for embodiment</i>	103
I. C. Martins, A. M. Oliveira, B. Steenbergen: <i>Representational momentum in people with cerebral palsy: Effects of response format and delay imposed on the response</i>	104
T. Miyaoka: <i>Measurements of distinguishing abilities of clothed buttocks</i>	105
J. S. Monahan: <i>Intermediate effects of spatial training women's Mental Rotation Test scores</i>	106
A. M. Oliveira et al.: <i>Metric effects of taking tears out of the Wong–Baker Faces Pain scale</i>	107
J. Schlittenlacher, A. Kern, W. Ellermeier: <i>Extracting salient perceptual features of machinery noise using triadic comparisons</i>	108
J. R. Schoenherr: <i>The centrality of psychophysics to psychology: A Hephaestian paradigm</i>	109
V. M. Shendyapin: <i>Computational modeling of correct responses proportion among confident ones in 'greater–lesser' task</i>	110
N.G. Shpagonova, V.A. Sadov, D.L. Petrovich: <i>Storage: The standard features in memory</i>	111
A. C. Silva, A. M. Oliveira: <i>Faces contextualized by faces: The similarity effect in face–context integration</i>	112
I. G. Skotnikova: <i>Visual discrimination asymmetry: Decision making criterion, time order error</i>	113
R. M. Tristão et al.: <i>Habituation vs. sensitization to pain in newborns</i>	114
M. Vicovaro et al.: <i>Randomly interleaved staircases and 'acceptance thresholds' in computer graphics experiments</i>	115
M. Wagner, T. Elbaum: <i>Haptic sensation elicited by visual stimulation: The "feeling by seeing" procedure</i>	116
Special symposium "Ernst Mach's legacy: Psychophysics and beyond"	117
K. Thoma: <i>Ernst Mach – examples of his scientific work in the area of applied physics and measurement techniques</i>	118
M. Heidelberger: <i>Mach on Helmholtz on acoustics</i>	119
E. C. Banks: <i>Mach on 'monocular stereoscopy'</i>	120
J. Wackermann: <i>Mach's concept of phenomenological science, and its relevance for psychophysics</i>	121
B. Henning: <i>Mach and Schlick on simplicity in science</i>	122
K. H. Siemsen: <i>Mach at younger ages, his research on psychophysics, his subsequent world view and his contribution to education</i>	123
H. Siemsen: <i>Psychophysics as world view: Ernst Mach's sensualism, gestalt and erkenntnis-theory</i>	124
Authors index	125

Theme session 4

Weber Fractions and Time-Order Errors for long and short durations: Implications for modeling

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Often, discrimination sensitivity is studied by a 2AFC method, keeping one stimulus as a standard and letting the other vary around it. According to the commonly assumed Difference Model for comparison, it should not matter whether the first stimulus is fixed and the second varied (Standard-Comparison, St-Co), or vice versa (Comparison-Standard, Co-St). The aim of this study was to study Weber Fractions (WFs) and Time-Order Errors (TOEs) as a function of interval duration and presentation order of St and Co for four different types of intervals.

Using a weighted up-down procedure, in each of eight conditions 28 participants compared successive interval durations with an ISI of 900 ms: St was 100 or 1000 ms (blocked). In each block, orders St-Co and Co-St were intermixed. Thus block types for each St were [St<Co, Co>St] and [St>Co, Co<St]. Interval types (blocked) were auditory (noise bursts) or visual (LED flashes); filled, or unfilled with 3-ms markers (between-groups); with or without correctness feedback (between-groups). Upper and lower thresholds (for 75 % correct) were used to determine JND and PSE, and thereby $WF = JND/St$ and $TOE = \pm(PSE - St)$.

For all interval types, TOEs were negative for St = 1000 ms, and positive for St = 100 ms. Feedback lowered WF by 15–20 %, but all interactions with Feedback were nonsignificant. For auditory-unfilled (AU; only 100 ms used) WF did not differ between orders. For visual-filled (VF), WF were significantly higher with Co-St than with St-Co; thus varying the 1st stimulus had a lesser impact on the response than varying the 2nd stimulus. In analogy with the definition of the TOE, also called Type-A effect (negative when the 1st stimulus is perceived as being of lower magnitude than an identical 2nd stimulus), this Type-B effect should be called negative. Positive Type-B effects were obtained as well: For visual-unfilled (VU) and auditory-filled (AF), WF were highest with Co-St for 1000 ms, but with St-Co for 100 ms. The interactions of Order \times Duration were highly significant. The effects refute the Difference Model, and suggest a flexible impact ratio of the 1st and the 2nd stimulus.

For AF intervals, the TOE and WF data confirm earlier results¹. For TOEs, the results demonstrate the common effect of stimulus level – negative TOE for long, but positive TOE for short durations. These effects refute an explanation by simple response bias. The results confirm that WF are affected by whether the 1st or the 2nd stimulus is varied, but refute the generalization that WF are always lower with St-Co than with Co-St. For AF and VU, varying the first stimulus (order Co-St) has a higher impact on the response, as shown by smaller WF, than varying the second (order St-Co). The Sensation Weighting Model^{2,3} can account for these effects, and also for positive as well as negative TOEs.

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